

## 4.10 Aesthetics

### 4.10.1 Existing Conditions

#### 4.10.1.1 *Project Area Aesthetics*

The Project Area is situated in the eastern portion of the City of San Diego, primarily in the Navajo Community Plan area but also includes portions in the Tierrasanta Community and the College Area Community Plan areas. The City of San Diego has adopted Community Plans for each of these areas that provide guidelines related to land use and development. New development needs to be consistent with the appropriate Community Plan guidelines and policies related to aesthetics. The portion of the Project Area located within the College Area Community Plan Area is not an area identified in the Community Plan as an area requiring special consideration for aesthetics.

The Project Area is generally urban in character. The open space areas included within the Project Area include the San Diego River and the surrounding native habitat. Portions of the Project Area have public views to the San Diego River and Mission Trails Regional Park. Neighborhoods within the community planning areas are walkable and residential uses are generally within walking distance to schools or shopping areas. The existing development within the Project Area includes commercial office, industrial-related structures, public and institutional facilities, parks, open space, and vacant land.

The Project Area is located in a valley, generally bounded to the east, west and south by relatively flat developed land and to the north and portions of the east by hillsides and canyons that help to frame the community area and define the pattern of development within the neighborhoods. The San Diego River has historically shaped the overall nature of the area's topography. The river currently traverses Mission Trails Regional Park and Mission Gorge, and runs along Mission Gorge Road in the northern portion of the Project Area, flowing from northeast to southwest. The portion of the river located in the northeast section of the Navajo community has been significantly altered as a result of an ongoing sand and gravel extraction operation. Much of the area in and around the river has already been mined and is currently being used for industrial and contractor storage and operation uses. A mix of retail, industrial and industrial office park uses have been developed along the portion of the river that forms portions of the northern and western boundary of the Project Area.

#### **A. Navajo Community Plan**

The Navajo community is characterized by a wide variety of natural features including flat mesas, steep canyons, and rolling hills. The most prominent feature in the Project Area is the San Diego River and Mission Trails Regional Park. Elevations within the community range from a low of around 100 feet above sea level at the westerly edge of Mission Gorge to 1,591 feet at the peak of Cowles Mountain, the highest point in the City of San Diego. Several streets and other public areas offer framed public views of panoramic aesthetic features such as the open space areas to the north of the community or to Lake Murray and its surrounding native habitats.

The Navajo Community contains a diverse land use development pattern with a majority of the area maintaining low to medium residential densities, while the commercial and industrial uses are focused along the main traffic corridors of Mission Gorge Road and Navajo Road.

The Navajo Community Plan's goals and recommendations, which directly apply to the aesthetics of the Project Area, include the following:

- Grading and landscaping standards should be improved. Hillside cuts, in particular, must be better controlled to preserve the natural topography;
- Enhance and maintain the aesthetic qualities of the San Diego River corridor as part of the open space system;
- The rear elevations of buildings which face the San Diego River or are visible from the street should be as well-detailed and visually interesting as the front elevations;
- Buildings developed adjacent to the river should be set back 150 feet from the river to avoid glare and shading impacts to the habitat;
- Continue the ongoing efforts to revitalize the commercial areas along Mission Gorge Road, establish one or more Business Improvement District;
- Site design should provide adequate visual buffers surrounding uses, such as with the use of landscaping or grade separation;
- Develop commercial areas which have desirably distinctive qualities in their design, appearance and operation;
- Improve the appearance of the existing strip commercial development on Mission Gorge Road between Interstate 8 and Zion Avenue by reducing signs, improving landscaping and architectural design, providing consistent building setbacks and providing adequate off-street parking;
- The removal of off-premise signs and the consolidation of multiple on-premise signs should be pursued during project reviews in an effort to reduce sign clutter and enhance the visual appearance of Mission Gorge Road;
- Ensure that industrial appearance and effects of industrial uses are compatible with the character of the surrounding residential and commercial areas and the sensitive resources of the San Diego River; and,
- Development along Mission Gorge Road shall comply with the regulations included in the Community Plan Implementation Overlay Zone (CPIOZ).

## **B. Tierrasanta Community Plan**

The Tierrasanta Community is generally a low density residential community. The presence of commercial areas are designated only where necessary to support the residential community, and the presence of industrial activity is limited to a small, isolated site. The plan seeks to capitalize on the open spaces of the cayonlands interspersed throughout the community as well as the expansive open space resource of the

nearby Mission Trails Regional Park. The San Diego River runs along the majority of the Tierrasanta Community Plan's southern planning boundary and is primarily considered in two ways: flood control and recreation.

The Tierrasanta Community plan's goals and recommendations, which directly apply to the aesthetics of the Project Area, include the following:

- Future development of areas that abut the Mission Trails Regional Park should be sensitive to it, as proposed within the Urban Design Element of the Tierrasanta Community Plan; and,
- To protect assets of Mission Trails Regional Park from degradation by surrounding development.

#### 4.10.1.2 *Light and Glare*

The Project Area is urbanized and substantial light and glare is produced by existing development. The Project Area currently consists of commercial, office, industrial development, public institutions, vacant land, and open space. Existing levels of light and glare are that of an urban, developed community and neighborhoods with daytime glare from building windows, automobile windshields, and paved surfaces. Nighttime light from billboards, commercial signage, buildings, automobile headlights and parking lot/security lighting also exist throughout the Project Area.

#### 4.10.2 *Impact Threshold*

*For the purposes of this EIR, the proposed project will have a significant aesthetic impact if it will:*

- *Block a view through a designated view corridor as shown in an adopted community plan, or the General Plan;*
- *Cause a substantial view blockage of a public resource (such as ocean) that is considered significant by the applicable community plan;*
- *Exceed the allowed height or bulk regulations, and this excess causes unnecessary view blockage;*
- *Have a cumulative effect by opening up a new area for development, which will ultimately cause "extensive" view blockage;*
- *Significantly alter natural landform features;*
- *Introduce development that is incompatible with surrounding land uses and community character;*  
*or*
- *Substantially increase light and glare affecting surrounding properties.*

#### 4.10.3 *Impact*

##### 4.10.3.1 *Project Area Aesthetics*

Implementation of the proposed Redevelopment Project will result in redevelopment of existing parcels and new development within the Project Area. Future redevelopment activities will need to be consistent

with the applicable Community Plans and the approval process for activities covered by the pertinent Community Plan.

Specific development proposals for the Project Area are unknown; however, any future development activities within the Project Area could potentially impact public views or scenic vistas from public areas, primarily with respect to the San Diego River.

As redevelopment activities proceed within the Project Area, each individual development proposal will need to comply with the development standards of the City of San Diego Land Development Code and the adopted design guidelines of the community or neighborhood in which it is located. Development activities that occur in the Project Area will be reviewed by the City for compliance with the Navajo and Tierrasanta Community Plan goals and objectives regarding aesthetics. Implementation of mitigation measure A1 would reduce the potential impact to a level less than significant.

Implementation of the proposed project is anticipated to result in the replacement of older undesirable development with new development that would be in compliance with the goals, objectives, and recommendations contained in the applicable Community Plans. This is anticipated to protect the existing desirable aesthetics within the Project Area and eliminate the undesirable conditions of the buildings and landscape in the Project Area.

The existing topography of the Project Area is relatively flat. There are no significant natural landforms located within the Project Area, although significant natural landforms are located adjacent to the Project Area including Mission Trails Regional Park. Because future redevelopment will be required to comply with the City's development standards related to landform including design, preservation of public views, and compatibility with surrounding land uses, the project will not significantly alter natural landform features and no significant impact associated with landform will occur.

#### 4.10.3.2 *Light and Glare*

As redevelopment occurs in the Project Area, the potential for light and glare will increase on a localized basis. Additional lighting sources may be introduced into new areas, and redevelopment has the potential to increase the overall affect of nighttime lighting within and adjacent to the Project Area. Additionally, glare from building surfaces would increase if future redevelopment proposals within the Project Area include the construction of buildings with greater reflective surfaces.

Because the Project Area is generally urban, proposed redevelopment activities are not anticipated to result in a significant increase in light and glare in the area. The future redevelopment is required to comply with current City development standards, which address lighting standards and compatibility of lighting with surrounding land uses. The impact associated with an increase in light and glare is considered less than significant.

#### 4.10.4 Significance of Impact

Future redevelopment activities within the Project Area may result in significant aesthetic impacts.

#### 4.10.5 Mitigation Measures

**A1** As redevelopment activities proceed within the Project Area, each individual development proposal shall be reviewed by the Agency and City to comply with the development standards of the City of San Diego Land Development Code and the adopted design guidelines of the Community Plans. Specific redevelopment projects shall incorporate appropriate design details and principals consistent with the Navajo and Tierrasanta Community Plans, including:

- The rear elevations of buildings which face the San Diego River or are visible from the street should be as well-detailed and visually interesting as the front elevations;
- Buildings developed adjacent to the river should be set back from the river to avoid glare and shading impacts to the habitat;
- Improve the appearance of the existing strip commercial development on Mission Gorge Road between Interstate 8 and Zion Avenue by reducing signs, improving landscaping and architectural design, providing consistent building setbacks and providing adequate off-street parking;
- Site design should provide adequate visual buffers surrounding uses, such as with the use of landscaping or grade separation;
- Develop commercial areas which have desirably distinctive qualities in their design, appearance and operation;
- Ensure that industrial appearance and effects of industrial uses are compatible with the character of the surrounding residential and commercial areas and the sensitive resources of the San Diego River;
- Development along Mission Gorge Road shall comply with the regulations included in the Community Plan Implementation Overlay Zone (CPIOZ); and,
- Future development of areas within the Tierrasanta Community that abut the Mission Trails regional Park should be sensitive to it, as proposed within the Urban Design Element of the Tierrasanta Community Plan.

#### 4.10.6 Conclusion

Implementation of Mitigation Measure A1 will reduce the potential aesthetic impact as a result of future redevelopment activities within the Project Area to a level less than significant.

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